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Language Change in Apparent and Real Time: The Community and the Individual

Natalie Schilling-Estes

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1 Introduction

Since William Labov's (1963) pioneering work on language variation and change in Martha's Vineyard and New York City in the 1960s, most variationist investigations of language change in progress have investigated change in apparent time—that is, in the speech of individuals of different generations at a given moment in time—rather than real time. This approach is based on the APPARENT TIME CONSTRUCT, which holds that, for the most part, the core features of an individual's vernacular language variety are solidified for life by the time they reach their late teens. The robustness of the apparent time construct has been borne out in a number of studies over the past four decades (e.g. Bailey 2002, Labov 1994). However, questions regarding its generalizability remain (e.g. Bailey 2002), and despite the difficulties of obtaining real time data, such data are a crucial supplement to apparent time data and in addition form the basis of continued research into how strongly we can rely on the apparent time construct in future studies.

In the present study, I compare changes observed in apparent time data from the mid-1980s in Smith Island, MD, with real time data obtained in 1999-2001. Both trend and panel methodologies were used—that is, both new speakers and previous study participants were included—thus enabling us to examine both community-wide and individual language changes.

2 The Smith Island Community and Dialect

Smith Island, located in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay, is actually a small group of islands that extends about eight miles north and south and four

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miles east and west. It is ten miles from the mainland Delmarva Peninsula and is accessible to this day only by boat. There are three small towns on the island, Ewell, Rhodes Point, and Tylerton, the latter of which is accessible only by boat from the other two. The island was first inhabited by English speakers in the mid-1600s and has existed for most of its history in relative isolation from the mainland. In that time, islanders have developed a strong sense of cultural uniqueness and a unique dialect of American English. This dialect consists of distinguishing features on all levels of language. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on two pronunciation features: the production of the /ay/ diphthong with a raised nucleus, as in [r Id] for *ride* (hereafter SI /ay/), and the production of /aw/ with a fronted glide, and often fronted nucleus, as in something like [dEIn] for *down* or [hEIs] for *house* (SI /aw/). I will also look at two morphosyntactic features: regularization to *weren't* in negative constructions, as it *It weren't me* or *I weren't there*, and extensive use of existential *it*, as in *It was three men outside* for *There were three men outside.*

Due largely to the increasing difficulty of making a living via small-scale maritime occupations, especially crabbing, the island population has been declining drastically over the past several decades, from about 650 in 1970 to only about 350 today. In addition, the island suffers from grave erosion and submersion problems and may not be habitable for very much longer, perhaps 50 to 100 years. The Smith Island culture and dialect are thus in grave danger of extinction. Despite the decline in numbers of speakers, apparent time data from the 1980s suggest that the dialect is actually becoming more rather than less distinctive from surrounding varieties as it moves toward death. This pattern of dialect intensification in a dwindling population, or DIALECT CONCENTRATION, has not been conclusively documented for any other receding language or language variety that we are aware of (Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1999). Because this change pattern is so unique, it is doubly important to ensure that our apparent time evidence is corroborated by real time data.

3 The Sample

The 1983 dataset consists of sociolinguistic interviews with 41 speakers of both sexes and three age groups: older speakers born between 1899 and 1932, which I will refer to as Generation I; middle speakers born between 1942 and 1961, Generation II; and younger speakers born between 1965 and 1971, Generation III. The sample from 1999-2001 consists of interviews and conversations with 40 speakers, 23 of whom fit into the three age groups from the 1983 study and 17 of whom fit into a newer generation, born be-

tween 1975 and 1987. The later sample also includes five re-interviews with speakers who took part in the 1983 study. We plan to conduct more re-interviews in the near future, though our efforts have been hampered by the fact that so many people have moved off the island since 1983.

For the purposes of this study, following Trudgill (1988), I will focus on comparing data on three generations of speakers from the earlier dataset with data from the next youngest generation. In addition, in considering the question of individual vs. community change, I will focus on one speaker who was interviewed in 1983 and 1999, to illustrate some of the difficulties confronting us in our ongoing panel study.

4 The Apparent Time Study

Impressionistic observation of the 1983 data indicates that a host of distinguishing dialect features show higher usage levels among middle-aged and younger speakers than older speakers, indicating general dialect concentration. Using a representative subset of speakers from the 1983 study, we have conducted quantitative analyses of the features noted above, and the results bear out our impressionistic observations. For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the external conditioning factor of age and briefly discuss gender. Internal factors were considered, but the results are not presented. Results are given in Tables 1 through 4 and in graphical format in Figure 1.

Percentages

Generation	SI /ay/ / Total
Gen. I (N = 6) (b. 1899-1932)	167/791 21%
Gen. II (N = 8) (b. 1942-1961)	275/742 37%
Gen. III (N = 10) (b. 1965-1971)	270/654 41%

VARBRUL Results

Generation/ Gender	Weighting
Gen. I Women	.14
Gen. I Men	.42
Gen. II Women	.62
Gen. II Men	.51
Gen. III Females	.55
Gen. III Males	.69

Input prob. = .26
X^2 per cell = .719

Table 1 The cross-generational patterning of raised /ay/ (mid-1980s) (adapted from Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1999)

Percentages

Generation	SI /aw/ / Total
Gen. I (N = 6)	17/273 6%
Gen. II (N = 9)	223/395 56%
Gen. III (N = 11)	182/322 57%

VARBRUL Results

Generation/Gender	Wtg.
Gen. I Women	.07
Gen. I Men	.11
Gen. II Women	.89
Gen. II Men	.31
Gen. III Females	.85
Gen. III Males	.43

Input prob. = .38
X^2 per cell = .571

Table 2: The cross-generational patterning of glide-fronted /aw/ (adapted from Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1999)

Generation	No. *weren't* / Total	Percentage
Gen. I (N = 7)	6/27	22%
Gen. II (N = 7)	17/36	47%
Gen. III (N = 9)	12/12	100%

Table 3: The cross-generational patterning of regularization to *weren't*[2] (adapted from Schilling-Estes 2000)

Percentages

Generation	Ext. *it* / Total	%
Gen. I (N = 4)	73/135	54%
Gen. II (N = 6)	133/172	77%
Gen. III (N = 7)	109/139	78%

VARBRUL Results

Generation	Wtg.
Gen. I	.32
Gen. II	.57
Gen. III	.59

Input prob. = .72
X^2 per cell = .000

Table 4: The cross-generational patterning of existential *it* (adapted from Parrott 2002)

[2]Note that the figures for regularization to *weren't* are based not on the number of *weren'ts* out of all cases of past tense negative *be*, but the number of *weren'ts* out of all utterances where the expected form is *wasn't*—for example, *I weren't home* or *She weren't there*. This correctly gives us usage levels for regularization to *weren't* rather than *weren't* in general.

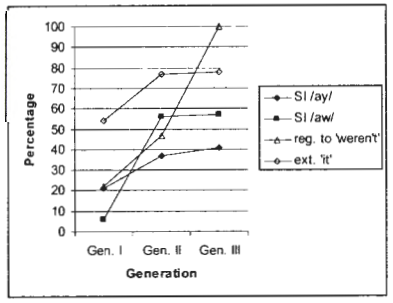

Figure 1: The cross-generational patterning of four features of Smith Island English in apparent time

The two pronunciation features, SI /ay/ and SI /aw/, show an increase between Generations I and II, especially SI /aw/, while both show a bit of a leveling off between Generations II and III. Similarly, regularization to *weren't* also increases dramatically, though this time chiefly between Generations II and III. Existential *it* also shows increasing usage levels in younger generations, with again the increase leveling off between Generations II and III.

5 Real Time Data on Community Change

Now let us turn to the real time data. To date, we have conducted quantitative analyses of two features in our new youngest generation, Generation IV, that were also examined in the 1983 dataset: SI /aw/ (Soukup 2002) and regularization to *weren't* (Schilling-Estes 2000, 2002b). Results are given in Tables 5 and 6. The results indicate that these two features seem to be holding their own in Smith Island English. In fact, usage levels for SI /aw/ have increased slightly between Generations III and IV, and the slight decline in regularization to *weren't* between Generations III and IV is due to only one utterance of *I wasn't*.[3]

[3]Trester (2003) has conducted an analysis of present-tense subject-verb concord for three generations of speakers in the later dataset—for example, in constructions such as *People comes over* or *The men fishes*. Her results indicate that not all vernacular features are intensifying rather than dissipating on Smith Island. The dissipation of nonstandard subject-verb concord may be due to its relative commonness in vernacular varieties of English vis-à-vis features like regularization to *weren't*.

Percentages

Generation	SI /aw/ / Total
Gen. I (b. 1899-1932)	17/273 6%
Gen. II (b. 1942-1961)	223/395 56%
Gen. III (b. 1965-1971)	182/322 57%
Gen. IV (N = 8) (b. 1975-1987)	261/399 65%

VARBRUL Results

Generation	Weighting
Gen. I Women	.05
Gen. I Men	.08
Gen. II Women	.85
Gen. II Men	.25
Gen. III Women	.81
Gen. III Men	.36
Gen. IV Women	.70
Gen. IV Men	.69

Input prob. = .45
X^2 per cell = .808

Table 5: Glide-fronted /aw/ in real time (adapted from Soukup 2002)

Percentages

Generation	No. *weren't* / Total	%
Gen. I	6/27	22%
Gen. II	17/36	47%
Gen. III	12/12	100%
Gen. IV (N = 6)	27/28	96%

VARBRUL Results

Gen.	Wtg.
Gen. I	.08
Gen. II	.18
Gen.	.87
Gen. IV	.95

Input prob. = .67
X^2 per cell = 1.030

Table 6: Regularization to *weren't* in real time (adapted from Schilling-Estes 2000)

Some even more interesting parallels between regularization to *weren't* and SI /aw/ emerge when we look at their patterning not only across generational groups but gender groups, as shown in Figure 2. Whereas men in the oldest generation show slightly higher usage levels for SI /aw/ than women, women show far higher usage levels in Generation II, indicating that it was mostly Smith Island women who were responsible for initiating the change toward increased usage levels for SI /aw/. The gender gap narrows somewhat in Generation III and has almost completely closed by Generation IV. A similar pattern of decreasing gender differences emerges for regularization to *weren't*. This time, however, it is men who led the change, and again, the most dramatic increase took place in Generation II. Women caught up a generation later, and by Generation IV, males and females both show practically categorical use of *weren't* for past tense negative *be*.

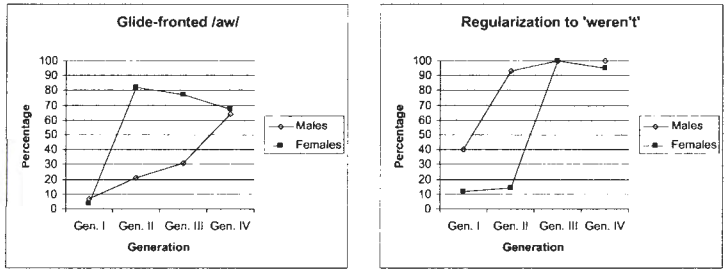

Figure 2: Raised /ay/ and glide-fronted /aw/ by gender and generational group (adapted from Schilling-Estes 2000, 2002b; Soukup 2002)

The closing of the gender gap for these two features in Generations III and IV is also rather unusual, as we typically expect gender differentiation to increase rather than decrease as linguistic changes spread throughout a community (Eckert 2000, Labov 1990). However, in a previous study (Schilling-Estes 2000) I hypothesized that the male-female convergence in usage levels for *weren't* is due to the same sense of diminishing cultural uniqueness that led islanders to increase their usage levels for this and other features in the first place. In such a situation it is important, not merely for *some* members of the community to demonstrate dialectal distinctiveness, but for *all* members to come together around common norms, so that they can present a united front, as it were, against the inevitable encroachment of the outside world. So it stands to reason that females would increase their usage levels for *weren't* to match those of island men and also that we'd see a similar closing of the gender gap that earlier affected SI /aw/. Of course, this mustering of linguistic defenses is probably largely unconscious, though it may not be a coincidence that SI /aw/, now one of the most widespread features on the island, is also one of the most talked-about, and so may serve as a symbolic token of islander identity.

6 Real Time Data on Individual Change

6.1 Quantitative Patterns

Now let us turn to some preliminary results from our limited panel study of Smith Island English. We will focus on the speech of one participant, DM, a male who was 17 at the time of the original study and 33 at the time of the second (Premilovac 2002). DM works off island during the week as an insurance agent; however, he spends most weekends on the island helping to

run his family's store in Tylerton and considers Smith Island to be his home. In each case, the data were gathered by means of a sociolinguistic interview (e.g. Labov 1972b). Because the sociolinguistic interview is designed to minimize contextual effects on people's speech by getting them to produce speech that is as natural and unaffected as possible, it is typically held that we can extract interview data from the contexts in which they occur, pool them with data from other speakers and so obtain meaningful patterns of synchronic variation. It should also be possible to compare interview data from an individual speaker at two different time periods to investigate the question of the stability of the individual vernacular.

To date, we have conducted quantitative analyses of usage levels for two features in the two interviews: SI /ay/ and SI /aw/. Results are shown in Tables 7 and 8. Following environment was also considered in the VARBRUL analyses, but results are not reported here, as our focus is on the external factor group of interview year (Decade).

Decade	SI /ay/ / Total	%	VARBRUL wtg. (n.s.)
1983	45/168	27%	.61
1999	21/163	13%	.39

Input prob. = .12
X^2 per cell = .720

Table 7: DM's raised /ay/ in 1983 and 1999

Decade	SI /aw/ / Total	%	VARBRUL wtg.
1983	17/82	21%	.74
1999	0/82	--	.28[4]

Input prob. = .09
X^2 per cell = .753

Table 8: DM's glide-fronted /aw/ in 1983 and 1999

The results show that DM's speech seems to have changed quite a bit between 1983 and 1999, especially with respect to SI /aw/, whose usage level declines all the way to zero in 1999[5]. It seems, then, at least at first

[4]One application and one non-application were added to each of the linguistic environments in the 1990s data to avoid a knockout factor.

[5]Note, though, that DM retains a fairly high usage level for another unusual /aw/ variant—namely, [əʊ], the "Canadian raised" variant (e.g. Chambers 1973). Interestingly, it is this variant rather than the glide-fronted one that may have been

glance, that we cannot necessarily trust the apparent time hypothesis, since it is grounded in the assumption that individual speech patterns will not undergo the changes we see in DM's speech. In addition, our real time data look slightly suspect as well, since DM's dialect seems to have changed in the opposite direction from that of the community as a whole.

Upon closer inspection, though, DM's data may be less damaging than we suspect. First, although there have not been many quantitative sociolinguistic studies of individual speakers over time, the studies that have been conducted point to the diachronic stability rather than instability of adult speech (e.g. Bailey 2002). It is also well known that adults and older children are far slower than younger children to learn non-native languages or dialects and in fact may never completely conform to new speech patterns (Chambers 1992, Payne 1980). In addition, studies of variation in the community vs. the individual have demonstrated that individual patterns of variation do not typically differ drastically from community-wide patterns (Guy 1980). Thus, rather than question our conclusions regarding apparent and real time change in Smith Island based on DM, we might want to question whether we can extract his data from the two different contexts in which they were gathered without considering possible situational effects that might render them less than fully comparable.

6.2 Qualitative Considerations

Although variationists typically *do* extract data from context, they do acknowledge possible contextual effects on interview data, for example, formality, audience, and topic (e.g. Bell 1984, Labov 1972a, Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994, Schilling-Estes 2002a). It is quite likely that such considerations come into play in the DM data. Although the interviews were very similar and covered many of the same topics (e.g. family, island traditions, bad weather), the first was conducted by a female relative of approximately the same age as DM, on the island in one of their homes. The second, on the other hand, was conducted by two strangers from a nearby university and took place in DM's insurance office on the mainland. Thus what we may be observing across the two interviews may not be a decline in DM's dialectal distinctiveness but rather a shift from casual, vernacular speech to a more self-conscious style in which DM speaks more standardly than usual. And such a style shift could be expected to be characterized by greater shifts in usage levels for highly salient features like glide-fronted /aw/ more so than

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the prevalent variant in Tylerton in the 20th century. Further examination of subtle dialectal differences in the three Smith Island towns is pending.

features of which speakers are less aware, and so help account for the greater decline in DM's usage levels for SI /aw/ vis-à-vis SI /ay/ across the two interviews (cf. Schilling-Estes and Wolfram 1999).

It might be argued, then, that in order to obtain comparably natural, vernacular data and hence a truer picture of DM's speech over time, we need to locate the same interviewer as in 1983 and have her interview DM in the same way, in the same location. In addition, we might want to avoid quantitative study of self-conscious variants like glide-fronted /aw/, since we do not necessarily expect consistent patterns of usage across different contexts.

However, in addition to the obvious practical difficulties of a re-interview in which all conditions are kept as constant as possible, there are other reasons why we might not wish to take such measures. First, whereas many, probably most, quantitative sociolinguists maintain that the goal is to obtain data that are completely unaffected by context—namely, "baseline" or vernacular speech (e.g. Labov 1972b)—others, including myself, have pointed out that there really is no such thing as vernacular, "default" speech and there can be any number of types of unselfconscious or casual speech, since speakers always shape their speech to fit the context, even when they're at their most relaxed (e.g. Milroy and Gordon 2003, Wolfson 1976). Further, self-conscious speech isn't necessarily to be avoided, since speakers often effect self-conscious styles outside the study setting, including self-conscious styles that can in no sense be considered "formal" or overly "standard" (Schilling-Estes 1998). In addition, self-conscious variants such as SI /aw/ will often be very important to the people who use them, and to exclude them from our studies risks painting a rather distorted picture of everyday language use, since it may be replete with self-conscious linguistic stereotypes as well as more unconscious markers and indicators.

Given that speech is always affected by its context, it is perhaps best, not to continue to strive to negate contextual effects, but rather to further investigate them. This is especially important given that a much wider range of contextual factors may shape speech patterns than variationists have typically acknowledged (e.g. Schilling-Estes 2002a).

Two speaker-internal factors whose effects on interview data I have been investigating in recent years (e.g. Kiesling and Schilling-Estes 1998) are FOOTING and FRAMING. (Goffman 1974, 1981; Schiffrin 1994). Footing refers to the roles participants cast themselves and others into as they converse, while framing has to do with participants' sense of what sort of interaction is taking place. Variationists, especially those who study stylistic variation, are certainly aware of the effects of participants' role relations on speech style. However, for variationists, interlocutor relations are usually seen as fairly permanent, involving such matters as shared vs. non-shared

demographic characteristics or symmetrical vs. asymmetrical social roles. But role relations may change, even in the course of a single conversation, as for example when an interviewee suddenly turns the tables and starts asking questions of the interviewer. Clearly, if role relationships can change during an hour-long interview, they can certainly change over a couple of decades. Thus, even if DM were interviewed today by the same interviewer as in 1983, in the same setting, there is no guarantee that the two would stand in the same relation to one another and hence produce comparable speech data.

In addition to footing, there is the matter of framing. Because the sociolinguistic interview is a rather unusual speech event—namely, an interview disguised as a casual conversation—speakers' conceptualizations of what the event *is* may vary greatly from speaker to speaker, and even within a single speaker, during the course of a single interview. For example, it is not uncommon for variationists to be engaged in an interview where the interviewee has been talking unselfconsciously for a long time and then suddenly focuses on the fact that the interview is being recorded, perhaps because the tape has to be changed or because they've broached a sensitive subject. This focus will often cause a "formal" interview frame to surface, but sometimes the result is different. For example, awareness of the tape recorder can trigger a "dialect performance" frame, causing the interviewee to switch into exaggeratedly dialectal speech (Schilling-Estes 1998). Or the interviewee might even perform the entire act of being interviewed, yielding a sort of "mock serious interview" event. This is rare, but it seems to be exactly what happens in DM's 1983 interview. The excerpt in (1), taken from near the beginning of the interview, illustrates.

(1)[6] DM: And I have a sister that was born Easter morning. Which was—was on.. a very rough night.. that she had to travel across the sound, and give birth to it that night going over.

FW: Now tell me about that. What happened? (background laughter, short laugh by FW) Come on, L--.

DM: At expect, precisely ten oh—ten fifty p.m., Mother was stricken with a pain.

FW: (laugh) Well what happened, was it a bad night?

[6]Commas indicate short pauses; periods and series' of periods indicate pauses of increasing duration, based on impressionistic observation. (Pauses were not timed for the purposes of this study.) Hyphens indicate false starts; a series of dashes indicates information omitted for confidentiality reasons. Parentheses indicate inserted explanatory material.

DM: Yes, it was—it was blowing around forty or fifty.. knots, and… and mother dear was stricken.. her water bursted. And we had to—she knew she had to get o—over to the mainland right away. And it was nobody.. uh, the doctor was not available. Or to us it was not available, so anyway.

In addition to the elevated diction and background laughter evident in the transcript, DM also indicates a "mock serious" mode through the use of exaggerated intonational contours and slow, deliberate pacing. The "mock serious" frame seems to be triggered not only by the presence of the tape recorder but also by the fact that the interviewer is a close family member who does not normally go around interviewing her relatives. Amazingly, DM manages to maintain his "mock serious" mode throughout most of an hour-long interview, though he occasionally breaks down, as evidenced in such features as faster pacing, more level intonation, and reference to common friends and relatives without added explanation for benefit of the non-present audience of researchers who will later listen to his recorded interview.

By the time he is a grown-up, in 1999, DM has added the "real interview" frame to his repertoire of speech styles and is able to provide factual information about the island and his life to strangers, utilizing a fairly elevated tone and deliberate pacing without the exaggeratedly formal features of his earlier interview. Thus, while much of the difference between DM's two interviews is probably due to factors like interviewer identity and setting, we cannot deny the effect of frame, especially considering that DM's speech varies between "mock serious" speech and conversational speech (and probably other styles as well) *within* the earlier interview, where audience and setting remain constant.

7 Conclusion

To summarize, there are several conclusions to be drawn from our study of language change in Smith Island. First, the apparent time study indicates that the Smith Island dialect is a rare, perhaps unique, example of a language variety that is becoming more rather than less distinctive as it loses speakers and moves toward death. This pattern of dialect concentration is borne out in our real time study of a new generation of islanders, who show similar and in some cases higher usage levels for distinguishing dialect features than the youngest age group interviewed in 1983. And whereas at first glance our preliminary panel study of a single speaker in 1983 and 1999 causes us to question the stability of the individual vernacular and hence the merits of the

apparent time hypothesis, closer examination indicates that instead we should be questioning the unthinking removal of sociolinguistic interview data from the contexts in which they are situated, including not only external context but also, and perhaps especially, speaker-internal considerations such as footing and framing. It may very well be that DM isn't suffering from dialect loss at all. Rather, he, and others like him who have been forced to seek employment off the island, may have developed into adept style shifters who have added more standard styles to their repertoire while at the same time holding onto the distinctive variety of English that is being so actively maintained on their island home.

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Linguistics Department
480 Intercultural Center
Georgetown University
Washington, DC 20057-1051
ns3@georgetown.edu